

Autopsy Doctor Says Films Back Warren Report

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By PETER KIHSS

X-rays and photographs taken during the autopsy of President Kennedy verify the location of a disputed wound at the base of the back of his neck. But by themselves they cannot end the argument over a bullet's path through his body.

This was the opinion yesterday of one autopsy surgeon, who has seen the X-rays and photographs, which were put into the National Archives Oct. 31. It is also the private opinion of two investigators for the Warren Commission.

In a telephone interview from Bethesda, Md., Dr. J. Thornton Boswell, a retired Navy commander now in private medical practice, said he and the chief autopsy pathologist, Capt. James J. Humes, agree the pictures cannot prove the so-called single-bullet theory.

Single-Bullet Theory

This theory holds that one bullet pierced the back base of the President's neck, passed through and emerged at the lower left part of his tie knot and then wounded Gov. John B. Connally Jr. of Texas in the back, chest, wrist and thigh.

The Warren report said there was "persuasive evidence" for the single bullet theory "although it is not necessary to any essential findings."

The commission held that Lee Harvey Oswald alone assassinated the President, firing three shots in less than eight seconds, including one probable miss. If the President and Governor were wounded separately, questions of timing and the possibility that there were two rifles have been raised by critics.

Dr. Boswell said yesterday he saw the photographs for the first time last Nov. 1. They

now clearly, he said, the accuracy of the autopsy report and of the autopsy surgeon's testimony as to the location of the wound.

Error in 'Hasty' Diagram

It was his diagram, Commission Exhibit 397, Dr. Boswell said, that critics of the Warren Commission have cited in arguing that the wound was farther down the back. He said this hasty "work sheet," made during the autopsy, had a "diagram error"—a dot that placed the wound incorrectly. But he said the notes he wrote on the diagram did locate it accurately.

The tracing of the bullet's path must still depend on medical interpretation because it went through soft tissues and muscles, Dr. Boswell said. These were bruised, he said, but the pictures do not conclusively show the path.

Dr. Boswell said of the diagram:

"This was unfortunate. If I had known at the time that this sketch would become public record, I would have been more careful. It was strictly a work sheet, the same as rough working notes. You could see that by looking at it. It was very dirty.

"Its sole purpose was to indicate for the autopsy doctors right, left, front, back—things like that. The photographs were to provide the exact visual description."

'Absolutely No Doubt'

Autopsy surgeons have "absolutely no doubt in our minds now" that a single bullet hit both President Kennedy and Governor Connally, Dr. Boswell said.

Dr. Boswell said Federal Bureau of Investigation reports used by the critics were "simply wrong." The F.B.I. agents present during the autopsy were

"not trained in medicine," he said.

F.B.I. spokesmen have said the agents' reports covered discussions that took place during the autopsy. The reports did not take in the final autopsy report, the bureau said.

In the report, the surgeons, after having spoken the next morning with a Dallas hospital surgeon, concluded that the bullet had gone out through a hole in the throat, which had been obliterated by an emergency operation.

The Warren Commission published "schematic drawings" done by a Navy medical illustrator and based on measurements and verbal descriptions given him by the autopsy surgeons just before they were called to testify.

Downward Path Shown

The drawings include Commission Exhibit 385, which shows the downward path the bullet is thought to have taken through the President's neck, and they remain "sufficient to illustrate the finding," Dr. Boswell said yesterday.

Dr. Boswell noted that his diagram, which differs from Exhibit 385, included his handwritten notes of the specific measurements. These fixed the disputed wound at 14 centimeters, or 5½ inches, from the right acromion process, the tip of the right shoulder joint, and 14 centimeters below the tip of the right mastoid process, the bony point immediately behind the ear.

Hole Below Shoulders

In his book "Inquest," Edward Jay Epstein had cited the diagram as indicating a wound higher in front than in back. In his first Viking Press edition, Mr. Epstein gave the text of an F.B.I. summary report

placed in the national archives, which said medical examination had reported a bullet entering the President "just below his shoulder."

In a later Bantam edition, Mr. Epstein added an F.B.I. report that said Dr. Humes located during the autopsy an apparent bullet hole "below the shoulders."

"The end of the opening could be felt with the finger," and Dr. Humes had offered an opinion that the bullet possibly "worked its way out of the body during external cardiac massage," the report said.

In the current Esquire magazine, Mr. Epstein wrote that there was a "flagrant contradiction" between the autopsy report and the F.B.I. agents' report. Mr. Epstein argued that "by viewing the photographs the contradiction can be resolved once and for all time."

According to Volume 2 of the Warren Commission documents, Dr. Humes reported that X-rays and photographs had been made before and during the autopsy. He said the physicians studying the "wound in the lower posterior neck of the President" had "examined carefully the bony structures in this vicinity as well as the X-rays, to see if there was any evidence of fracture or of deposition of metallic fragments." They saw none, he said.

Bruises Photographed

Dr. Humes testified about bruises and discoloration on the upper portion of the right lung and reported that "Kodachrome photographs were made of this area in the interior of the President's chest."

He testified that the black and white and the color negatives made during the autopsy were not developed before they were turned over to the Secret Service.

Star The Kennedy X-Rays

SIR: As a physician and medical administrator, I was more than puzzled by the recent article concerning the "donation" by the Kennedy family of photographs and X-rays made by the U.S. Naval Hospital at Bethesda in the course of performing an autopsy on the late President Kennedy. Such records are customarily the property of the hospital or medical organization performing the indicated medical procedure and each hospital must retain the original of such records in its files except as it may be directed to do otherwise by court action. In this case, there is the additional complication that these records were the property of the United States Government and should have been available to the Warren Commission in its investigation.

I cannot see that there is any excuse for the release of these records by Naval authorities to the Kennedy family or for that family to place any restrictions on their use by the Federal Government. The records of medical procedures, conducted at a hospital under no circumstances, Government or otherwise, belong to the family nor does any hospital administrator have the right to authorize such release.

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